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ABSTRACT

Any public or private, non-profit agency, organization, or institution committed to research in rural education may apply for official endorsement from the National Rural Education Association (NREA) to establish a recognized Rural Education Research Center. The major objectives of NREA endorsement of ongoing or future research include: (1) keeping rural education a prominent item on the agenda of state and federal offices, public agencies, and institutions of higher education; (2) providing an increased research focus to public entities serving rural populations; (3) providing public or private non-profit agencies, institutions, or organizations with added creditability when seeking internal or external funds to conduct research with a rural focus; (4) serving as a mechanism for data gathering and dissemination that will provide local, state, and federal policymakers with accurate and timely information for decisionmaking; and (5) allowing for a network of rural researchers to coordinate efforts and share information. The NREA endorsement is initially for a period of 3 years with successive renewals of 5 years. Endorsement requirements are: (1) expertise in and publicly available reports on rural education research; (2) support from parent organization, colleagues, and a variety of schools or intermediate service units; (3) commitment of a minimum of 2 fulltime personnel and $10,000 of operating expenses and support services; (4) evidence of an appropriate plan and willingness to disseminate research results; and (5) a written 5-year research agenda with annual progress reports. Two endorsed NREA Research Centers are the Center for Rural and Small Schools at Kansas State University and the Rural Education Research and Service Consortium at Tennessee Technological University. (ALL)

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NATIONAL RURAL EDUCATION ENDORSED RESEARCH CENTERS: CURRENT ACTIVITIES AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

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NATIONAL RURAL EDUCATION ENDORSED RESEARCH CENTERS: CURRENT ACTIVITIES AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Discussion of research and development needs for rural and small schools has become more prevalent in recent years. The first Rural Education Research Forum held in conjunction with the 79th annual National Rural Education Association (NREA) conference in Lake Placid, New York was an effort by NREA to establish a yearly symposium which would bring researchers and practitioners together to discuss research needs, share data, network activities, and otherwise promote research efforts in rural education.

The Research Forum is now in its fourth year. What began as a small group, composed mostly of "academic types" assembled on the shores of Lake Placid, has now grown to an annual meeting of more than 100 participants who represent a cross section of researchers and practitioners from throughout the United States. The Research Forum is now an integral part of the annual NREA conference.

Although the Forum is still in its early development, its significance to rural education is well recognized by leaders of the organization. It is fully anticipated that interest in the Forum will continue, attendance and participation will increase, and that it will assume a major role in the collection and dissemination of data needs and findings relevant to rural schools.

Establishment of NREA Endorsed Research Centers

Closely related in purpose to the annual Research Forum is the concept of NREA Endorsed Research Centers. In October 1989 (following the 81st annual conference in Reno), the NREA Executive Committee approved establishment of National Rural Education Association Research Centers. Centers can be established anywhere in the United States and its territories. Any public or private, non-profit agency, organization, or institution committed to the pursuit of research in rural education may apply for official endorsement from NREA as an NREA recognized Rural Education Research Center.

Purposes of NREA Endorsed Research Centers:

The major objectives behind the establishment of NREA endorsement of on-going or future research efforts include:

1. Keep rural education a prominent item on the agenda of state and federal offices, public agencies, and institutions of higher education.

2. Provide an increased research focus to public entities serving predominately rural populations.

3. Provide public/private, non-profit agencies/institutions/organizations with added creditability when seeking internal or external funds to conduct research with a rural focus.

4. Serve as a mechanism for data gathering and dissemination that will provide local, state, and federal policy makers with accurate and timely information for decision making.

5. Allow for a network of rural researchers to coordinate efforts and share information.

Selection Process for NREA Endorsement

The NREA Research Committee reviews applications and makes recommendations to the NREA Executive Committee to officially recognize "NREA Research Centers." The number of such centers so recognized is dependent upon the number that apply and meet established criteria. A plaque from NREA is provided each Center so endorsed. Recognition/endorsement will be for an initial period of three years with successive renewals of five years based on approval from the NREA Executive Committee.

Endorsement Criteria

Endorsement criteria for those interested in establishing their on-going or future activities as an NREA Rural Education Research Center are:

1. Organizational recognition as a unit within an existing institution, as a non-profit incorporated body, or as a part of an established organization.

2. A history of research with a rural education focus that can be demonstrated by publicly available reports.

3. Expertise in rural education, research and other appropriate areas.

4. Support from colleagues and a variety of schools and/or intermediate service units.

5. Commitment of a minimum of 2 FTE personnel (this may be spread among several personnel) and $10,000 of operating expenses and support services for research on problems relevant to rural education (this may be in kind and/or local funding).

6. Administrative support from parent organization and supervisor.

7. Evidence of an appropriate plan and willingness to disseminate research results through appropriate channels like NREA Research Forum, ERIC/CRESS, professional journals, conferences, etc.

8. Written research agenda for at least a 5 year period with annual progress reports provided for review to the NREA Executive Committee.

Application Procedure:

The formal application procedure requires that applicants provide information that responds to the following:

1. Indicate name of proposed Center

2. Identify name of sponsoring agency/institution

3. Describe the institution/agency of which the proposed Center is a part or an affiliate.

4. Describe the Center (history, purpose, organization, and other pertinent information).

5. List past research efforts in rural education and enclose samples of representative articles or reports.

6. Describe/demonstrate the resource commitment to the Center in terms of adequate personnel, operating expenses and support services.

7. Explain how research results will be disseminated.

8. Provide a summary of a 5 year rural education research agenda for the proposed Center.

9. Enclose with the application any supportive letters or other documentation that would be useful to the reviewers of the application.

Formal applications for an agency/institution to become an NREA recognized Research Center is open ended. Formal applications, or questions, by interested individuals should be submitted to:

Executive Director
National Rural Education Association Headquarters
230 Education Building
Colorado State University
Fort Collins, Colorado 80523

Establishment of the First NREA Endorsed Research Centers

The NREA Executive Committee endorsed two institutions as National Rural Education Research Centers at its mid-year meeting held in Colorado Springs, May 4-5, 1990 Selected as the first NREA Endorsed Rural Education Research Centers in the United States are **Kansas State University's Center for Rural and Small Schools** and **Tennessee Technological University's Rural Education Research and Service Consortium**. Barbara Havlicek directs the Kansas State center. The Tennessee Tech center is directed by Margaret Phelps. The two centers were selected from applications submitted to the NREA Research Committee.

Kansas State's Center for Rural Education and Small Schools

The College of Education at Kansas State University has maintained an organized effort to conduct rural education research through its Center for Rural Education and Small Schools since 1978. Endorsement by NREA of the Center acknowledges their past activities and officially recognizes future efforts. Some

of KSU's research efforts in the past include the following titles:

- Girls, Computers, and Amber Waves of Grain: Computer Equity Programming for Rural Teachers
- A Promising Teaching Training Model for Rural Settings
- Non Instructional Duties of Teachers in Rural/Small Schools
- Rural Special Education Teachers as Consultants: Roles and Responsibilities
- Financing Rural and Small Schools: Issues of Adequacy and Equity
- An Assessment of Students' Knowledge of Agriculture
- A Study of Rural/Small Schools and their Graduates in a Seven State Area

Kansas State's NREA Endorsed Research Center for Rural and Small Schools research agenda for the next five years plans to focus on four themes. A listing of these themes and some examples of planned research follows:

1. Effectiveness and efficiency -- eg., identification of student achievement as related to school size, use of instructional and administrative personnel, financial expenditures, school climate, student extra-curricular participation, and community support; etc.
2. Context and implications -- eg., identify profiles of schools serving rural areas by counties and selected states in terms of demographics and economic factors, educational levels, geographical location, etc.
3. Innovations -- eg., development of innovative programs for students, paraprofessionals, teachers, community members, etc.
4. Equity in educational opportunity -- eg., determine extent and level of educational services for exceptional populations; develop procedures and programs via technology and other means to provide equitable educational services for all students.

Tennessee Tech's Rural Education Research and Service Consortium

In 1984, Tennessee Tech established its Rural Education Research and Service Consortium to facilitate research and service activities of the University's College of Education. Past research efforts have included the following studies:

- Regional Approach to Rural School Improvement in Community Development
- A University Based Model for Literacy Enhancement through Rural Schools
- The Costs and Benefits of Investment in Rural Education
- Equality of Educational Opportunity in Rural America
- Arts in Rural Schools

Tennessee Tech's research agenda for 1990-95 will be focused around the design of studies to help answer the following questions:

- What characteristics of the home, local economy, family, school, and community are related to the school success of rural children?
- What strategies are effective in increasing non-traditional career choices and success among rural females?
- How can the rural school become a more effective partner in rural community development?
- How can the cycle of illiteracy and poverty be broken in the rural families of Southern Appalachia
- How can preservice and inservice rural teachers be better prepared for the academic, pedagogical and societal changes which they face?

The Need for Additional NREA Endorsed Centers

Undoubtedly many institutions, individuals and entities across the United States are conducting research in rural education and small schools. The National

Rural Education Association has no private ownership, claim, or monopoly on research in rural education. The Association encourages all efforts aimed at educational improvement wherever rural students and teachers in our country meet for learning and instruction. While the Association has no claim on research or authority to mandate how it is to be conducted and disseminated, it is keenly interested in seeing that efforts are coordinated and findings shared so that educational decision makers at local, state, regional, and national levels can knowledgeably make decisions based upon the most accurate and current data available. To this end, NREA should continue its efforts in support of the annual Research Forum and encourage public and private institutions/agencies to apply for NREA endorsement as recognized research centers.